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ABSTRACT

The Metropolitan Campus of Cuyahoga Community College (CCC) in Ohio conducted a survey of 239 institutions belonging to the University of South Carolina's National Resource Center for the Freshman Year Experience (FYE) to identify elements of a model program that could be established at other institutions. The summary revealed five key ingredients for the success of programs for first-time students: a recognized need for such programs, a staffed first-year experience office, a mandatory seminar for first-year students, involvement of former participants, and availability of ongoing intervention. The Metropolitan Campus has experienced the benefits cited throughout this article as a result of combining activities for first-time students with a comprehensive marketing plan and an enrollment development program. These programs not only offer greater hope for students seeking to accomplish their educational goals, but benefit the institution by helping to establish a firmer financial base, promoting partnerships between academic and student affairs, and showing students that the college cares for them. The CCC FYE multi-dimensional retention program outline includes its objectives; implementation timeline for early and late summer 1999 and fall 1999 and spring 2000; organizational chart of the Campus Provost/Vice President, Dean of Student Affairs, Academic Deans, and FYE Campus Coordinator; and recommendations. (VWC)

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The Value of Multi-Dimensional Retention Programs for First-time Students at Community Colleges

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Abstract

The Metropolitan Campus of Cuyahoga Community College conducted a survey of 239 institutions belonging to the University of South Carolina's National Resource Center for the Freshman Year Experience. The Purpose of the survey was to identify elements of a model program that could be established at other institutions. The survey results revealed five key ingredients for the success of programs for first time students. A recognized need for such programs, a staffed first year experience office, a mandatory seminar for first year students, involvement of former participants, and availability of ongoing intervention were revealed to be key elements of successful first year programs.

The Value of Multi-Dimensional Retention Programs for First-time Students at Community Colleges

The hopes of many first-time students attending community colleges are that these institutions can contribute to their educational and personal development, career advancement, or economic growth.

Occasionally, these hopes are diminished by unfamiliarity with the vast array of support services that can be essential to success but not immediately recognized by the new student who is attempting to become oriented to college life. Students who are unfamiliar with these services sometimes experience difficulty locating assistance with academic problems, forming connections with peer groups, and becoming comfortable in the college setting. These circumstances can lead to students dropping out.

To address this issue, some two and four-year colleges have adopted a seminar for first-time students. These seminars are a base for acquiring the skills, developing the knowledge, and forming the relations that lead to eventual success. The seminars are usually part of a comprehensive program designed to acclimate the freshman student to the academic setting by the end of the first year.

However, few community colleges offer comprehensive programs. This conclusion was drawn from a survey conducted at the Metropolitan Campus of Cuyahoga Community College. The 239 institutions surveyed were selected from the membership of the University of South Carolina's National Resource Center for the Freshman Year Experience.

A total of 145 schools responded to the survey. The results indicated that only 17-percent offered services dedicated to first-time students, including a freshman seminar. Three percent of the colleges maintained comprehensive programs directed by a staff member responsible for all activities for first-time students.

These comprehensive programs are described by M. Lee Upcraft and John Gardner, editors of Freshman Year Experience (1989), as an extensive array of services that "foster students' educational progress during the pivotal first year of college…and set the stage for continued academic success." Taking this description into account, we elected to interview representatives from the schools with comprehensive programs. Our purpose was to identify elements of a model program that could be established at the Metropolitan Campus and at other community colleges.

First, the respondents agreed that because of increased competition for students from all sectors (including four-year institutions and employers), dwindling enrollments, increasing attrition rates, and limited financial resources, programs for first-time students are now a necessary component at community colleges. These programs assist with recruiting students, contribute to academic success, and can be tailored to the needs of unique community college populations such as Displaced Homemakers, Tech Prep students, and students with disabilities.

Second, we learned that a central office, with sufficient staff and a director, should be maintained and supported by an advisory committee comprised of representatives from admissions, counseling, financial aid, the business office, and the academic departments. Their purpose is to coordinate and evaluate all services for first-time students. Among these services is a compulsory orientation program where students

are provided a general overview of the college, acquainted with registration procedures, given placement examinations, and counseled about course scheduling. After enrolling, the services offered to students are sessions on how to access institutional resources (such as computers), tutoring, periodic counseling, and regular academic progress reports from teachers.

Third, the central focus of the program is the mandatory seminar, offered for credit, that serves as an anchor for students during the first semester. The respondents indicated that the seminar:

- Helps acclimate students to the campus.
- Offers information to improve academic performance.
- Provides access to peers to develop a sense of community.
- Extends advising and referral to support services.
- Creates opportunities for involvement in social and extra-curricular activities.
- Offers information about the institutions that makes students knowledgeable consumers.

When possible, and with proper training, instructional faculty should teach the seminar and facilitate academic monitoring and intervention. These teachers are often experienced in the use of strategies, like distance education, instructional technology, and cooperative learning communities, that can be incorporated to make the seminar interesting and inviting to a more diverse student body.

Fourth, we concluded from the interviews that involvement of former participants of the program as peer advisors and mentors can be beneficial in helping new student to navigate the campus community. Also, they offer valuable advice as members of the

advisory committee and serve as an important avenue to new students by acting as hosts and tour guides for prospective students from their former high schools.

Finally, the respondents conveyed that ongoing intervention must be available when students complete the seminar to keep them connected to the program. This is accomplished best by assigning the student to a staff or faculty member who meets periodically with the student, monitors academic progress, and refers students to support services, such as counseling and tutoring.

The Metropolitan Campus has experienced the benefits cited throughout this article as a result of combining activities for first time students with a comprehensive marketing plan and an enrollment development program. Consequently, enrollment of recent high school graduates increased during 1997-1998 and 1998-1999 by 15 and 12 – percent, respectively. During this period, the number of African American, Asian American, and Hispanic students increased as well. The Fall, 1999 continuing student rate improved by four-percent to 64. These trends have encouraged the development among our faculty and staff of user friendly initiatives, like the "Ask Me Campaign," designed to assist students, especially those experiencing college life for the first time. These are tremendous accomplishments for our 6,000-student campus.

Our success demonstrates the value of programs for first-time student at community colleges. These programs not only offer greater hope for student seeking to accomplish their educational goals, but benefit the institution by helping establish a firmer financial base, promoting partnerships between academic and student affairs, and showing student that we care about them.

References

Upcraft, M.L.& Gardner, J.N. and Associates (Eds.) (1989). The Freshman Year Experience. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc.

CUYAHOGA COMMUNITY COLLEGE FYE PROGRAM

A MULTI-DIMENSIONAL RETENTION PROGRAM DESIGNED FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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OBJECTIVES

★Comprehensive Orientation: Create a connection to the college

★Provide support services through orientation and/or classroom interaction, printed materials

★Develop an appreciation for learning through year-long experiences

★Update & revise first-year student handbook to include college support system, registration process, student activities, college directory and financial aid

OBJECTIVES

★Create an administrative structure that oversees the development and program implementation

★Develop a mentoring program to increase faculty interaction with students

★Create a collaborative partnership between academic and student affairs that link all college resources by utilizing programs, services, activities and college personnel

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE:
Early Summer 1999

★Hire FYE full-time Campus Coordinators

★Establish FYE Center on each campus

★Faculty recruitment and development

★Orientation planning and set up for Fall 1999

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IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE:
Late Summer 1999

★Required Orientation

★A. Orientation
- Admissions/Welcome
- FYE explained and marketed
- Academic Advising
- Social/Tour
- Meet Academic Faculty

★B. Registration Orientation

★C. On-line Technical Orientation

★D. Specialized Orientation

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE: Fall 1999 & Spring 2000

FYE Experience Options

★ A. General Studies 1000 or
General Studies 1020

★ B. Student Success Workshops

★ C. Academic Course/FYE Content

★ D. Paired Courses
(academic with General Studies)

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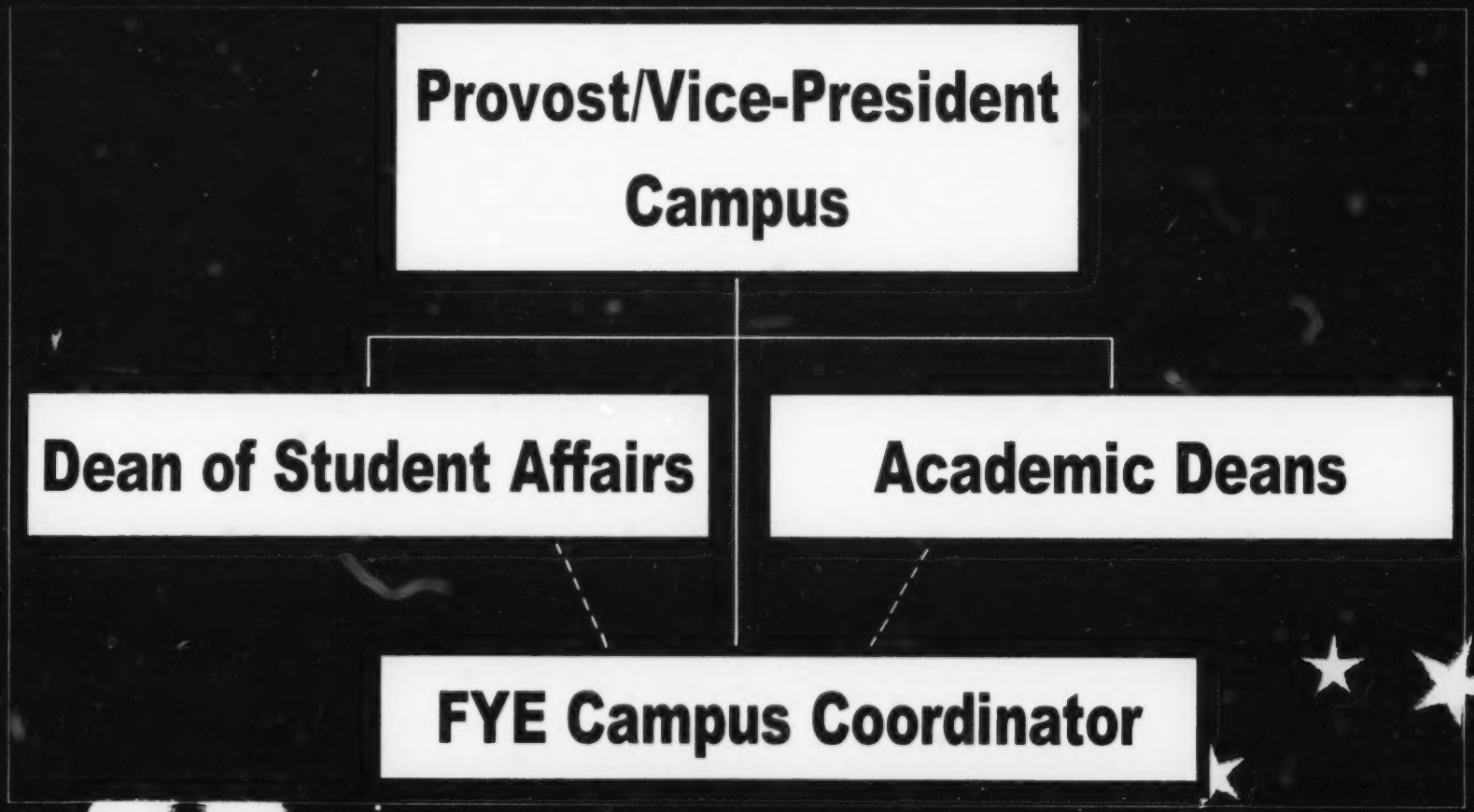
ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



RECOMMENDATIONS

★A commitment of financial and human resources to implement a comprehensive program college-wide.

★One coordinator assigned to each campus to develop, coordinate, implement and evaluate campus program.

★Mandatory participation for all new students to the college experience.

RECOMMENDATIONS

★Assign one counseling and academic faculty re-assigned time per semester to work with the FYE coordinator.

★Campus Provost identify a specific location to house the FYE Program.

★Full Implementation of the proposed program.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

★In support of the Developmental Education proposal -- all FYE students should be fully enrolled prior to the first day of class

★Counseling faculty be restored to its 1994 level to assure success of new program and initiatives

★Academic disciplines identify introductory courses which can include an FYE component